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Adaptation Practices and their Acceptance by Rural Smallholders: A Literature Review

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Abstract

Climate change will have a significant impact on the livelihoods of the rural poor living in developing countries. Projected reductions in yield in some African countries could be as much as 50 % by 2020, and net crop revenues could fall by 90 % by 2100. This amounts to a serious threat to food security and to the achievement of major development goals.

The project, “Strategies for Adapting to Climate Change in Rural Sub-Saharan Africa: Targeting the Most Vulnerable” (financed by GTZ/BMZ) provides adaptation practices resulting from impact modelling (IFPRI, PIK). However, considering the often low rate of uptake of adaptation practices by farmers, it is urgently necessary to improve the appropriateness of practices for the farmers. As long as the practices are not adapted to farmers’ needs and interests, they won’t be accepted, regardless of their effectiveness from a technical point of view.

The ZALF sub-project is therefore focused on identifying the degree of acceptance of adaptation practices by smallholders in vulnerable rural areas in Tanzania. Acceptance analysis can provide an indication of the willingness and ability of farmers to adopt innovations in order to cope with climate change impacts.

The contribution presents the results of a literature review on the acceptance of adaptation practices by smallholder farmers in the developing world. Acceptance is defined as “the property of an innovation, when introduced, to evoke a positive response from the individuals affected by it”. A “positive response” may range from consent to adoption of an innovation.

A conceptual framework developed at ZALF has been applied which, based on social scientific concepts, proposes a series of explanatory factors in adaptation. Farmers’ individual disposition, the interaction process during policy adoption, policy design and dissemination, and the societal environment are all considered as equivalent influencing domains.

The aim of this contribution is to present relevant factors influencing and limiting the decision to adapt, in relation to three categories:

- (1) the object of acceptance (i.e. the specific measure);
- (2) the subject of acceptance (i.e. the decision maker); and
- (3) the surrounding context (i.e. the social environment).

Keywords: Adaptation practices, climate change, literature review